

Charlize Theron says apathy is the greatest enemy of positive change

Issues around gender inequality and social injustices affect us all as a result of our interconnectedness as human beings - and are consequences of the decisions made by previous generations. This is the opinion of Oscar-winning and globally acclaimed, South African-born actress, Charlize Theron.



Charlize Theron talking during the PSG *Think Big Series*

This is what Theron expressed while participating in PSG's *Think Big Series* webinar on 17 August, a collection of dialogues with high-profile personalities that address a number of issues.

For Theron, the Covid-19 pandemic has shed light on societal problems such as poverty, lack of access, and the spread of disease. She said that these issues do not exist in a vacuum – they concern us all, but apathy - the greatest enemy of positive change - is at the core of why these social ills have not yet been eradicated.



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18 Aug 2021



Alluding to the South African concept of ubuntu, or the interdependence of society, Theron said, “Giving back, doing good, playing an active role in the fight against inequality, are not acts of charity. These acts embody a philosophy that extends beyond acts of goodwill. These are acts that need to be rooted in the understanding that someone else survives because we survive and vice versa. The world right now is a good example – we are facing the consequences today of the decisions that were made by the generations of yesterday.”

Theron shared her views on issues like the spread of HIV in Africa, gender inequality and the upsurge in domestic violence that has been catalysed by the onset of Covid-19. She also shares her opinions on the future of the film industry and the philanthropic work that is close to her heart.

The film industry

When asked what the “post-Weinstein” era holds for women in the film industry, Theron explains that the recent wave of exposures related to sexual harassment by prominent men in Hollywood was “more than an industry turnaround,” and instead, a “social awakening.” As she asserts, we cannot look at the Harvey Weinstein scandal in isolation – it forms part of a broader narrative that includes events like the murder of George Floyd, which highlighted the plight of African-Americans and the global black community.



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As she explains, “These events have caused a ripple effect that has resonated through all industries. In the film industry for example, we’re becoming more aware of the lack of female representation with particular emphasis on minority groups. Change is not happening fast enough, but it is happening. All of us are feeling the weight of the responsibility to make sure that we are not part of the problem and that those of us who do have decision-making power need to play a role in rectifying these wrongs.”

A messenger of peace

Theron is recognised by the United Nations as a messenger of peace and is the founder of the Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTOP) – an organisation dedicated to supporting community-based initiatives that implement HIV prevention programmes that serve adolescents throughout Africa. The foundation’s most recent exploit was a global campaign entitled, *Together for Her*, which raised awareness around the dramatic increase in gender-based violence during the pandemic.

For Theron, “the work never stops.” CTOP is a grant-making foundation that assists grassroots organisations in Africa who are making a positive impact on their communities, by raising funds and resources that will fuel their work to continue. Commenting on the prevalence of HIV and domestic violence in South Africa, Theron says the reality is that South Africans make up 1% of the world’s population but account for 19% of all people living with HIV in the world. “We can rant and talk about the injustice, but the world does not respond to tantrums – it responds when people become part of the solution.”

Streaming and the film industry

When asked about the impact that streaming services like Netflix are having on the film industry and on cinema attendance, Theron says that the emergence of these new technologies do not mark the end of traditional theatre. It is simply another platform for storytelling. What’s more is that the advent of streaming has democratised the industry and made it more accessible to women and people of colour who now have more opportunities to build careers in the entertainment industry.

As she explains, the misconception that audiences do not long to see women in leading roles, is simply that – a vast

misconception.



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Theron said, “There is plenty of data that demonstrates that audiences want to see female leads coming out strongly in the entertainment industry. For emerging female actors, the appetite is there. My production company, Denver and Delilah Films, continues to invest a lot of resources into developing material for actresses of colour. What people need to understand is that promoting gender and racial equality in film doesn’t only make social sense, it is also economically viable.”

Nerine Brink, PSG Wealth Employee Benefits adviser, wrapped up the webinar by reflecting on the importance of “controlling your own narrative,” as a woman – a notion that is of particular relevance during national Women’s Month.

Brink said, “This talk has brought many issues to the fore, including the fact that social justice is everyone’s fight – it is relevant to us all because we are interconnected, and this is the philosophy we need to be passing on to future generations.”

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